

Parents: Do you know a bully?

What can you do?

Understanding what *drives* the bully will make all the difference in answering this question. Be warned: it will take time, energy and care to foster a relationship with a bully--but this relationship may be the experience that they need to be able to examine and change their behavior.

Talking with a bully can help the bully to:

- Identify the ways, times, places and people that they bully
- Understand how bullying hurts others and themselves
- Explore the reasons why they bully and understand the emotions driving their behavior
- Find respectful ways to express and use their personal power

Conversations with a bully should **NOT**...

1. **Be a group experience** – the setting and nature of a group may reinforce negative behaviors, teach bullies how to bully better or create new struggles for power or status. As a parent, building that one on one relationship and dialogue is key.
2. **Be a lecture** – rather, a conversation. Listening should be your main role in this conversation. Using active listening skills will open doors and remove barriers in the conversation, allowing for the bully to feel comfortable and share more.

Conversations with a bully **SHOULD**...

1. Happen when emotions have cooled. Your voice and body language should be calm and non-accusatory, and the child should feel as comfortable and calm as possible so that he/she can reflect instead of deflect.
2. Start the conversation by sharing your observations in a non-judgmental way:
 - “I’ve noticed that you don’t seem to like Mark.”
 - “How were you feeling when you talked with Amanda?”
 - “It seemed like things got pretty tense in there.”

3. As the conversation progresses, listen for the child's underlying emotions. Was he/she feeling powerless, angry, afraid, left out, overwhelmed? As you hear them, state them and allow the child to agree or disagree with you:

- "It sounds like you felt excluded."
- "It sounds like she made you really angry."
- "You felt sad when he said that."

If you label their emotion incorrectly, ask the child to explain their emotion to you.

4. Display empathy for their feelings, and relate if possible.

- "I feel left out sometimes too. It doesn't feel good."
- "That must have felt really frustrating."
- "I know I've felt that way before."

5. After labeling and validating the child's feelings, ask the child how the other person might have felt.

- "How do you think Tiffany felt when you were having that conversation?"
- "Why do you think Adam might have reacted that way? How do you think he might have been feeling?"

6. Remind the child that he/she does not have to be friends with everyone, but that he/she DOES have to respect everyone. Then, help the child make an action plan for the next time he/she feels that emotion.

- "What do you think you could do next time you feel angry in Mr. Washington's class?"
- "When you see him tomorrow, will you still feel mad? What are you going to do about it?"

Finally, remind the child that you know that he/she can act appropriately and responsibly and that you are there for them. Remind them that you will be watching to make sure that they are using the tools you discussed.

Parents: Is your child being cyberbullied?

What can you do?

Parents need to monitor their child's safety – whether their child is on the world wide web or if they are in the real world. Safetyweb.com provides parents with some useful tips if their child is the target of cyberbullying.

1. **Maintain an open door policy.** Kids are often too scared to report bullying incidents. They may feel embarrassed, frightened, and even guilty that they did something wrong. *Some kids are simply too scared to tell their parents about cyberbullying for fear of their cell phone and Internet privileges being taken away.*
2. **Don't overreact.** Try to evaluate the situation and be supportive of your child without immediately calling the school, but...
3. **Ask questions.** Cyberbullying is not a joke. Find out if your child believes he/she is in actual physical danger. If a real threat has been made or there was already an assault, contact the school district and your local authorities immediately.
4. **Be understanding.** Remember that words do hurt. Cyberbullying can be extremely cruel and more traumatizing than in-person bullying because it might be anonymous and it occurs 24/7. Your child may be truly suffering emotionally. Tell them that they are not alone.
5. **Never retaliate.** Responding to a cyberbully is not recommended, as it can sometimes create more friction and increase the harassing incidents. Encourage your child to avoid retaliation whenever possible as well.
6. **Save the evidence.** If things do escalate, you will need digital or hard copy records of the harassment to present to the police.
7. **Know your school's policies.** Most schools are mandated by the state to have policies on bullying, harassment and violence. Find out what your school's policies are and hold them accountable for enforcing the rules if cyberbullying is happening during school hours or on school property.

8. **Monitor communications.** Learn who your child is communicating with both online and via cell phone. The easiest way of doing this is by using an Internet monitoring service (like SafetyWeb). ***Watch closely for the warning signs that cyberbullying is continuing or becoming more frequent.***
9. **File a complaint.** If the harassment takes place via cell phone, trace the number and contact the cell phone carrier. If the bullying occurs online, you can contact the site's administrator or Internet service provider.
10. **Get the "Find Help" Facebook app.** SafetyWeb has launched a helpful new tool for users to easily report inappropriate behavior or content online. Kids can bookmark the app and then click "Find Help" to be directed to useful phone numbers and links for reporting incidents.
11. **Consider counseling.** If your child is exhibiting signs of depression or anger, consult with your family physician or a behavioral health professional for advice on further treatment.

STOP BULLYING

Warning Signs Your Child Is Been Bullied

- 1. Alone at school most of the time:** Make sure you have a good relationship with your child's teachers so that you can check in with them. Social isolation is an indicator of bullying – cyber or otherwise.
- 2. Primary interaction is with younger students:** This could indicate that they are having problems in their own peer group.
- 3. Avoids recess or lunch, or is frequently late to class:** Recess, passing time, and lunch are times when students generally have more freedom and alone time – allowing bullying to take place.
- 4. Avoidance of discussions about what they are doing on the computer:** Children who are being cyberbullied often don't want to admit what is happening. Be on the lookout for vague responses with few details.
- 5. Stops answering phone or email, or apprehensive about receiving emails or texts:** A bullied child may try to ignore what is happening by ignoring their phone or email/Facebook messages all together. If your child previously loved these devices and stops using them, he/she may be being cyberbullied.
- 6. Mood changes after using the computer or electronic devices:** Being sad, upset or angry after computer/phone is an indicator that things on the computer/phone did NOT go well.
- 7. Frequent injuries or damages/loss of to clothing or property:** Either from the bullying at school, or from themselves as trying to release anger or fear can sometimes result in the damage of inanimate objects.
- 8. Academic issues:** Focusing on school may be the LAST thing on their mind if they are being harassed at school and online.
- 9. Low self-esteem:** If all day all you hear is the terrible things about you – true or not – they can become internalized and your child may begin to own this comments.

10. **Sadness.** Dealing with name calling, social isolation and feelings of worthlessness can become quite overwhelming, and feeling sad or tired can be a natural reaction.

11. **Depression:** Untreated, unending sadness can lead one to feelings of constant rumination, which can lead to depression. Depression symptoms are worsened by a perceived lack of social support.

12. **Anxiety:** Feelings of anxiety are rooted in fear. Fear that cyberbullying or bullying will not end can lead to anxiety. The fear of not knowing what to expect can also lead to feelings of anxiety as well.

13. **Aggression:** On the flip side of depression and anxiety is another reaction. Anger and aggression can be what fuels or gives the student the strength to deal with the feeling of constant onslaught that bullying can provoke.

14. **Psychosomatic symptoms:** Not feeling well, headaches, upset stomach – the mind has a very powerful effect on our body. If your child is being bullied, he/she may experience body symptoms as a result of the stress, anxiety, and anger he/she is feeling. Additionally, your child may experience sleep problems which exacerbate these symptoms.

15. **Not want to be involved in family or school issues.** Choosing to isolate themselves can be one way that your child may seek control over a situation. When your child feels that what other people are saying is true and his/her self esteem is at a new low, he/she may not feel worthy of doing things that are fun and may feel like no one wants him/her around.

